

Transboundary Water Cooperation in Central Asia

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This report is drafted by Bo Libert, Regional Adviser UNECE with contributions from Batyr Hajiyeu, UNECE officer in Almaty, and is divided into two parts:

1. Overview of activities funded or co-funded by GIZ
2. Results compared to project benchmarks and indicators

Sections high-lighted in grey below are copied from the project document.

1. Overview of activities funded or co-funded by GIZ

Work packages Sub-component 1: Regional Institutions on Water Cooperation:

- a) Preparing and supporting at least two meetings of the coordination group on the regional space for water and environmental information. The group should discuss and agree upon a broad outline of a regional information space.

Work undertaken:

The first meeting of the Coordination Group took place on **1 and 2 September 2015 in Almaty** (meeting report: http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/water/centralasia/Report_on_the_First_Meeting_of_the_Coordination_Group_Almaly_1-2_Sept_2015_Final.pdf). It was attended by all IFAS organizations and institutions, including EC IFAS, ICWC Secretariat, SIC ICWC, ICSD Secretariat, SIC ICSD, BWO Syrdarya, BWO Amudarya, the Coordinating Dispatch Centre Energy, the Regional Mountain Centre of Central Asia, the Regional Centre on Hydrology, the Central Asian Regional Environment Centre as well as the World Bank.

The establishment of this group with the aim of creating a unified information space under IFAS was supported by a decision of ICSD. A Letter of Intent between EC IFAS and the UNECE from 2014 also confirmed the need to address the gap in the information management in the areas of water, environment and hydrology in Central Asia. The first meeting of the Coordination Group identified the lack of coordination between the environment, water and energy sectors, and between national and regional organizations as a major problem. The creation of a unified information space would require the definition of, and agreement on primary sources of information, agreed protocols and formats for data

exchange, harmonized methodology for the processing of information and preparation of analytical reports and an agreed set of criteria and algorithms for modelling and forecasts.

The involvement of the energy sector (not participating in IFAS activities) in the work of the Coordination Group is tentatively very useful. The participation of the Coordinating Dispatch Centre Energy in the work of the Coordination Group may help to resolve one of the main problems identified during the first meeting, the lack of information on the operation of large reservoirs which are under the control of the energy authorities.

A second meeting was held **18-19 February 2016 in Almaty** (meeting report: http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/water/centralasia/Report_on_the_Second_Meeting_of_the_Coordination_Group_Almaly_18-19_Feb_2016_Final.pdf). A working group meeting with the participation of the main institutions was held **14-15 June 2016**.

After the conclusion of the GIZ project this work has continued in cooperation with the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC). In parallel with UNECE efforts to establish a unified information space on water, environment, energy and hydrology, CAREC has been implementing an initiative aimed at supporting regional organizations in their efforts to improve coordination of regional activities that also includes information management. UNECE supported the proposal by CAREC to merge these processes and a meeting of the information coordination group jointly organised with CAREC took place **5-6 December 2016**. Participants confirmed previous recommendations and included the following items in a work plan for 2017: i) launching an e-bulletin aimed at informing about new e-products introduced in the region; ii) developing an e-catalogue consisting of information products. The group also decided to develop a project on priority areas identified by the group and search for financial resources to support the project. A mailing list has been established to facilitate project development. The process will be led by UNECE in partnership with CAREC.

- b) Supporting the preparation and holding of one meeting of ICSD where a decision supporting the implementation of the Road Map on institutional and legal strengthening of ICSD should be adopted as well as agreement reached on the implementation of at least one project contained in the Road Map.

Work undertaken:

Support to ICSD continued although the decision by its Turkmen Chairmanship to cancel the ICSD meeting planned for December 2015 caused delays. An informal ICSD meeting at the end of November 2015 in Almaty offered an opportunity to touch base with member States on on-going activities (without the adoption of any decision).

There has been a general unwillingness of ICSD to make specific decisions for action during the time period of the project including in the meeting held in Ashgabad **25-26 May 2016**. However, the Road Map was discussed at that meeting and SIC ICSD was tasked to finalise it

and distribute it to countries for approval. The result of this further work is not known. See also comments below on ICSD.

- c) A set of activities building the capacity of SIC ICSD in the field of information management as a decision support tool for ICSD is implemented. The activities should use primarily local, Central Asian expertise, complemented by international experts as necessary. These activities should be an integral part of work on the planned regional space for water and environmental information.

Work undertaken:

The situation in ICSD and its weak decision-making efforts made it difficult to proceed as initially planned under this work package. However, work on the institutional and legal strengthening of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea continued, to some extent focusing on the ICSD and improved decision support through better information management.

Cooperation with the Uzbek Chairmanship of the Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea remained limited despite the Statement of Intent that included a number of proposals for joint action signed between EC IFAS and the UNECE in October 2014.

UNECE advised Turkmenistan in its preparation for the IFAS chairmanship. In regular contacts with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs UNECE provided inputs and feedback on the vision for the Chairmanship including on the revision/development of Aral Sea Basin Programme 4, the upgrading of the Regional Environmental Action Programme in light of green economy initiatives and Sustainable Development Goals, and further strengthening of the institutional capacity of IFAS.

Mr Sagit Ibatullin, the Chairman of EC IFAS during the Kazakh IFAS Chairmanship visited Ashgabat in the end of **November 2015** and helped to initiate capacity building of the Turkmen IFAS Chairmanship team before the actual take over.

Mr. Marton Krasznai, UNECE Regional Adviser, Mr. Sagit Ibatulin, former EC IFAS Chair, and Ms. Inessa Vezhnovets, book-keeper during the Kazakhstan IFAS Chairmanship ran a Capacity Building Workshop for Turkmen experts on how to organise the work of the Executive Committee of IFAS in Turkmenistan **24-26 August 2016 in Ashgabad** (meeting report:

http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/water/meetings/Water_Convention/2016/Projects_in_Central_Asia/EC_IFAS_capacity_building_workshop_Ashgabad_1608.pdf). Participants highlighted the usefulness of the training and asked for it to be repeated when the Chairman and the team of EC IFAS would be appointed. The duration of this training could be extended as there would be a need to elaborate the work programme of EC IFAS for the first year.

Complementing the work implemented under the GIZ project a number of other UNECE activities supporting transboundary water and environmental cooperation provided synergies, including on information management. This included work on regional cooperation on water quality and dam safety, a nexus assessment of the Syr Darya river basin, the future Kazakh chairmanship of the Water Convention as well as establishment of the International Water Assessment Centre under the Convention in Astana. UNECE support to bilateral water cooperation on the Chu and Talas rivers between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and environment and hydrology cooperation between Afghanistan and Tajikistan also contribute to strengthening the principles of cooperation and information sharing in the region. More information about these projects are found here: <http://www.unece.org/env/water/centralasia.html>.

Work package Sub-component 2: International Water Law and IWRM

- a) Support of representatives from Central Asia to participate in events organized by the UNECE Water Convention (tentatively the IWRM Working Group, Geneva in June and the Meeting of the Parties in Budapest in November 2015) where also separate workshops for Central Asian participants are organized.

Work undertaken:

While not directly funded by GIZ an informal meeting of Central Asian representatives was organized in **Geneva 23 June 2015** in collaboration with and participation of GIZ. During this meeting the regional cooperation was discussed and information on current projects and initiatives was exchanged (Meeting report: http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2015/WAT/06Jun_23_Geneva/23_June_2015_CA_meeting_minutes_rus.pdf).

During the Meeting of the Parties of the Water Convention in **Budapest 19 November 2015** a side-event was organized on the application of international water law in the region. The well-visited event was chaired by the GIZ project manager Volker Frobarth and concluded that there is a gap between principles of the Water Convention and the situation in the region and that Central Asian countries need to make joint efforts to correctly interpret and implement them.

GIZ funds were used to support participation of representatives from Central Asia in the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management in **Geneva 18-19 October 2016**. In this meeting specific issues relevant for Central Asia were raised such as climate change adaptation in transboundary basins and analysis of the nexus in transboundary basins.

The United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia (UNRCCA) has in recent years conducted a series of meetings to present the advantages of a new, subregional water agreement that would contain a clause on compulsory third party arbitration. The UNECE at the same time conducted activities to build the capacity of Central

Asian countries to implement key principles of the Water Convention and convince upstream countries to accede to it. After an initiative to support the implementation of universally accepted principles of international water law in a more pragmatic way than before was launched at the side event of the Meeting of the Parties of the ECE Water Convention accounted for above, UNECE and UNRCCA have agreed to organise joint activities in Central Asia to support the implementation of key principles of international water law to resolve disputes and strengthen cooperation. The first seminar of this kind (funded by UNRCCA and with UNECE participation) took place in **Almaty 12-13 September 2016**.

2. Results compared to project benchmarks and indicators

Project benchmarks

The following benchmarks were established for the project:

- 1) Regional cooperation on water and the environment: information management at the regional level as decision support tool to the International Fund for the Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) and its institutions is improved. Decision making and program implementation by the Inter-State Commission on Sustainable Development (ICSD) as well as the Executive Committee of IFAS (EC IFAS) becomes more effective.

After the project:

While steps have been taken to improve information management, no progress can be demonstrated with regard to the efficiency of ICSD and EC IFAS decision making and program implementation. Lack of understanding between the countries and the explicit non-participation of Kyrgyzstan in IFAS organizations and events in 2016 have blocked regional efforts of these two organizations. In the dialogue with Turkmenistan, the future Chairman of IFAS, a focus has been the improvement of the cooperation between the countries. It remains to be seen if the new Turkmen Chairmanship will make a significant contribution in this respect.

- 2) The capacity of Central Asian governments to understand and apply international water law and conventions is improved and the relevant instruments and best practices are increasingly used in interstate relations.

After the project:

While an improved capacity to understand international water law can be noted, including among experts in non-Parties such as Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, a region-wide application of

the corresponding principles cannot be seen. However, there are positive steps taken in bilateral settings. In the cooperation between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan on the Chu and Talas rivers as well as the environment and hydrology cooperation between Afghanistan and Tajikistan important principles such as regular consultations, coordinated monitoring and exchange of information are being developed and implemented.

Project indicators

The following indicators were established for the project:

IA1.1 ICSD approves the Road Map on its institutional and legal strengthening and implementation of the project on the development of a regional water and environmental space starts in mid-2015.

This indicator has not been fully achieved. ICSD has not been able to approve the Road Map while significant progress with regard to the regional water and environmental information space can be noted. The institutional strengthening of ICSD (statute of ICSD), revision of REAP in line with green economy concepts and SDGs, the Framework Convention on Environmental Protection for Sustainable Development in Central Asia (the Ashgabat Convention) remain high on the agenda of ICSD. Moreover, partner development organizations (UNEP, GIZ) are also interested in supporting ICSD to address these areas

IA1.2 Improved coordination between information providers and users in the water and environmental sectors in Central Asia.

A process has been initiated to provide an improved coordination with the establishment of the Coordination Group on the regional space for water and environmental information. The work plan for 2017 for the Coordination Group includes several further steps for improved coordination.

IA 2.1: Central Asian participation in events organized by the UNECE Water Convention including separate workshops for Central Asian participants.

Active participation of Central Asian representatives can be noted in most of the directions of work under the UNECE Water Convention including corresponding meetings. This project has supported participation in the Meeting of the Parties in 2015 as well as the Working Group on Integrated Water Resources Management in 2016.